Gargoyles

BEING

STRANGELY WROUGHT IMAGES

OF LIFE AND DEATH

BY

ALEISTER CROWLEY

FOYERS
SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION
OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH
1906

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No.

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IMAGES OF DEATH

GARGOYLES

Nec tamen illa mihi dextra deducta paterna
Fragrantem Assyrio venit odore domum
Sed furtiva dedit muta munuscula nocte.

TO LOLA BENTROVATA.

Go sunnily through my garden of flowers, dear maiden o' mine, and once in a while you shall come upon some grotesque Chinese dragon with huge and hideous eyes leering round the delight of the daffodils; or it may be some rude Priapus looking over the calm rock-shadowed beauty of the lake; or even, hanging amid the glory of elm or beech, an human skeleton, whose bones shall rattle in the breeze, and from whose eyeless sockets shall glare—?—I dare not bid you guess what evil knowledge.

Then, an you be wise, you shall know that a wise gardener wisely put them there. For every garden is the world; and in the world these are.

So every cathedral is the world, and the architect of Notre Dame deserved his heaven.

To me life and death have most often appeared in majesty and beauty, in solemnity and horror; in

emotions, to be brief, so great that man had no place therein. But there are moods, in which the heights are attained indirectly, and through man's struggle with the elemental powers.

In these poems you shall hear the laughter of the gods and of the devils; understand their terrors and ecstasies; live in their heavens and hells.

But I not only heard and understood and lived; I sounded and imposed and begat: you must also do both, or the universe will still be a mystery to you as to the others.

IMAGES OF LIFE

PROLOGUE.

VIA VITAE.

I.

My head is split. The crashing axe
Of the agony of things shears through
The stupid skull: out spurt the brains.
The universe revolves, then cracks,
Then roars in dissolution due;
And I am counting up the gains
And losses of a life afire
With dust of thought and dulled desire.

II.

So, all is over. I admit
Futility the lord of will.
Life was an episode, for me

As for the meanest monad, knit
  To man by mightier bonds than skill
    Of subtle-souled psychology
May sever. Aim in chaos? None.
The soul rolls senseless as the sun.

III.

Existence, as we know it, spins
  A fatal warp, a woof of woe.
    There is no place for God or soul.
Works, hopes, prayers, sacrifices, sins
  Are jokes. The cosmos happened so:
    Innocent all of guide or goal.
Else, what were man's appointed term?
To feed God's friend, the coffin-worm!

IV.

Laugh, thou immortal Lesbian!
  Thy verse runs down the runic ages.
    Where shalt thou be when sun and star,
My sun, my star, the vault that span,
  Rush in their rude, impassive rages
    Down to some centre guessed afar

By mindless Law? Their death-embrace
A simple accident of space?

V.

Where is thy fame, when million leagues
  Of flaming gas absorb the roll
    Of many a system ruinous hurled
With infinite pains and dire fatigues
  To build another stupid soul
    For fools to call another world?
Where then thy fame, O soul sublime?
Where then thy victory over Time?

VI.

Wilt thou seek deeper than the fact?
  Take refuge in a city of mind?
    Build thee an house, and call it heaven?
Rush on! there foams the cataract,
  Blind steersman leader of the blind,
    Sole devil herald of the seven
Thy garnished halls should house, O Christ,
Thou being dead, thou sacrificed

VII.

Not for atonement, not for bliss;
  Truly for nothing: so it was.
    Nay, friends, think well! Renounce the
      dream!
Seek not some mystery in the kiss,
  Some virtue in the chrysopras,
    Some nymph or undine in the stream.
Things as we know them should be enough
To glut our misery and our love.

VIII.

Why must despair to madness drive
  The myriad fools that fear to die?
    God's but a fervid phantom drawn
Out of the hasty-ordered hive
  Of thoughts that battle agony
    In the melancholy hours of dawn.
When vital force at lowest ebbs
Anaemic nerves weave frailest webs.

IX.

So, be content! Should science cleave
The veil of things and show us peace,
Well:—but by wild imagining
Think not a golden robe to weave!
Such moulder. By fantastic ease
Ye come not well to anything.
Work and be sober: dotage thinks
By worth of words to slay the Sphinx.

X.

Things as they are—of these take hold,
Their heart of wonder throb to thine!
All things are matter and force and sense,
No two alone. All 's one: the gold
Of truth is no reward divine
Of faith, but wage of evidence.
The clod, the God, the spar, the star
Mete in thy measure, as they are

XI.

So lifts the agony of the world
From this mine head, that bowed awhile
Before the terror suddenly shown.

The nameless fear for self, far hurled
By death to dissolution vile,
Fades as the royal truth is known:
Though change and sorrow range and roll,
There is no self—there is no soul!

XII.

As man, a primate risen high
Above his fellows, work thou well!
As man, an incident minute
And dim in time's eternity,
Work well! As man, no toy for hell
And heaven to wrangle for, be mute!
Let empty speculation stir
The idle fool, the craven cur!

XIII.

Myself being idle for an hour
I dare one thing to speculate:
Namely, that life hath cusps yet higher
On this our curve: a prize, a power
Lies in our grasp: unthinking Fate
Shall build a brain to nestle nigher

Unto the ultimate Truth: I burn
To live that later lives may learn.

XIV.

Simple to say; to do complex!
  That we this higher type of man
    May surely generate, o' nights
Our lesser brains we vainly vex.
  Our knowledge lacks; we miss the plan.
    Fools hope our luck will set to rights
Our skill that 's baulked. Yet now we know
At least the way we wish to go.

XV.

This task assume! Colossal mind
  And toil transcending, concentrate
    Not on the metaphysic wild;
Not on the deserts vast and blind
  Of dark Religion; not on Fate,
    The barren ocean; but the Child
Shows us a beacon in the night;
A lens to lure and lend the light.

XVI.

Wisdom and Love, intenser glow!
  Beauty and Strength, increase and burn!
    Be brothers to the law of life!
Things as they are—their nature know!
  Act! Nor for faith nor folly turn!
    The hour is nigh when man and wife,
Knowing, shall worship face to face,
Beget and bear the royal race.

THE WHITE CAT.

Hail, sweet my sister! hail, adulterous spouse,
  Gilded with passionate pomp, and gay with guilt:
Rioting, rioting in the dreary house
  With blood and wine and roses splashed and spilt
About thy dabbling feet, and aching jaws
  Whose tongue licks mine, twin asps like moons that curl,
Red moons of blood! Whose catlike body claws,
  Like a white swan raping a jet-black girl,
Mine, with hysteric laughter! O white cat!
  O windy star blown sideways up the sky!
Twin cat, twin star, 'tis night; the owl and bat
  Hoot, scream; 'tis us they call—to love or die.
Twin cat, our broomsticks wait: we'll fly afar!
We'll blaze about the unlighted sky, twin star!

ALI AND HASSAN

FROM THE ALF LAYLAH WA LAYLAH.

ALI bade Hassan to his house to sup.
They ate, passed round the full forbidden cup,
Till, in an interval of dance and song,
Hassan forgot his manners—loud and long.
Struck with confusion, forth he fares, takes ship
To utmost Ind and far-off Serendip.
Full forty years he there abides: at last,
Rich and respected, he contemns the past:—
"If I declare myself, there 's hope, I wot,
Hassan 's remembered, and his fault forgot!—"
Determines to revisit home. Sweet airs
Accomplishing the voyage, he repairs
Unto the barber. "Tell me of the state!
Haroun still holds the royal Caliphate?"



"Nay," said the barber, "long ago he passed
Where all delights are 'stinguished at the last,
And all good things forgotten, wallahy!
He died—aha now!—no—yes—let me see!
Ten years, three months, four days, as I'm a sinner,
Since Hassan let the—shame—at Ali's dinner."

AL MALIK.

A GHAZAL OF AL QAHAR.

AL MALIK the magnificent
Was sitting in his silken tent.

But when he saw the boy Habib
I wis his colour came and went.

Quoth he: By Allah, 'tis a star
Struck from the azure firmament!

Habib: I pour the wine of love
For Al Awaz the excellent.

The king: I envy him thy shape,
Thy voice, thy colour, and thy scent.

Habib: In singing of his slave
Hath Al Awaz grown eminent.

The king: But I, to taste thy lip,
My kingdom willingly had spent.

Habib: Asylum of the World!
My master bade me to present

My loveliness to thee, whose brows
Like to a Scythian bow are bent.

The king accepted him to bear
His cup of wine, and was content.

Let Al Qahar their praises sing:
Three souls, one love, one element.

Note.—This poem is very much taboo in Persia, as it is supposed to be little better than a pamphlet in favour of Christianity. The later work of Al Qahar, and especially his masterpiece, the Bagh-i-muattar, are, however, if not quite above suspicion, so full of positive piety of the Sufi sort that even the orthodox tolerate what the mystic and the ribald silently or noisily admire.

SONG.

I.

DANCE a measure
  Of tiniest whirls!
Shake out your treasure
  Of cinnamon curls!
Tremble with pleasure,
  O wonder of girls!

II.

Rest is bliss,
  And bliss is rest,
Give me a kiss
  If you love me best!
Hold me like this
  With my head on your breast!

ANICCA.

He who desires desires a change.
  Change is the tale of life and death.
Matter and motion rearrange
  Their endless coils; the Buddha saith:
    "Cease, O my sons, to desire!
      Change is the whole that we see
    By the light of a chaos on fire.
      Cease to desire—you are free!"
Your words, good Gotama, are brave and true;
Easy to say, but difficult to do!

TARSHITERING.

NEPALI LOVE-SONG.

O KISSABLE Tarshitering! the wild bird calls its mate—and I?
Come to my tent this night of May, and cuddle close and crown me king!
Drink, drink our fill of love at last—a little while and we shall die,
O kissable Tarshitering!

Droop the long lashes: close the eyes with eyelids like a beetle's wing!
Light the slow smile, ephemeral as ever a painted butterfly,
Certain to close into a kiss, certain to fasten on me and sting!

Nay? Are you coy? Then I will catch your hips
and hold you wild and shy
Until your very struggles set your velvet buttocks
all a-swing,
Until their music lulls you to unfathomable ecstasy,
O kissable Tarshitering!

Note.—This poem is probably the original of the well-known Hindu love song:

"Thora thairo, Tenduk, thora thairo, tum!
Thora thairo, thairo thora, thora thairo, tum!"

A FRAGMENT.[1]

In the midst of the desert of Libya, on a mound of sand, lieth a young man alone and naked. Nightfall.

NIGHT the voluptuous, night the chaste
Spreads her dark limbs, a vaulted splendour,
Above the intolerable waste.
Night the august one, night the tender
Queens it and brides it unto me.
I am the soul serenely free;
I dare to seek the austere ordeal
That drags the hoodwink of the Real
Back from the Maker's livid eyes
Lustred with hate. At noon I came
Blind in the desert, saw the sun
Leap o'er the edge, a fury of flame

[1] Intended as the prologue to a history of an initiate in semi-dramatic form.

Shouting for rapture over his prize,
The maiden body of earth. Outrun
The violent rays; the dawn is dashed
In one swift moment into dust.
Long lies the land with sunlight splashed,
Brutally violate to his lust.
Alone and naked I watched through
The appalling hours of noon; I parched;
I blistered: all the ghastly crew
Of mind's sick horror mocked me; arched
The flaming vault of hell and pressed
Its passionate murder in my breast.
Seven times I strove to slay me: filled
My mouth with sand to choke my breath.
In vain! No loftier purpose willed
The iron miracle of death.
So, blind and strangled, I survive.
So, with my skin a single scar,
I hail the night, the night alive
With Hathor for the evening star.
O beauty! See me broken, burned
Lone on the languorous Lybian plain!
Is there one lesson to be learned

From this my voluntary pain,
My dread initiation, long
Desired and long deferred? The Master—
Is he the secret of the song,
Portent of triumph or disaster
The night wind breathes upon the air
Still shimmering from the fearful heat?
Can I still trust who have learned to dare?
All others I have known effete,
Bid them await. Who knows to-day
The purpose of the dread essay?
Surely I, earlier, further fared!
I knew the deed that closes clay,
Division's sword by sense unbared,
A living lie. The deep delusion!
Dividuality—confusion!
These I unmasked of yore. To-day
The hideous blue, the hideous gold
Of sky and sand their wrath unrolled,
Their agony and hate proclaimed.
Is it that night shall kiss to peace
The furious carnival that flamed
Its ruinous ardour from the sun?

Nay, let all light, all things, but cease!
Sense is the seal of double rule.
The million oracles that run
Out of the mouth of God the fool
Are not myself. To nothing turn!
To nothing look! Then, then!—discern
Nothing, that one may one remain.
So I am paid the horrible pain
That these my brothers ordered me.
I look upon their brows—I see
Signs many and deep of torture past;
A star, yon star, true peace at last.

(*There approach an aged man, riding upon an ass, with a led ass, and a Nubian servant.*)

The Adept. In the name of God, the One, the Great,
Merciful and compassionate,
Acclaim the perfect period
Of ordeal past!

The Neophyte. There is no God!

A. Rise! in the name of obscure Fate,
Ruthless and uncompassionate.

N. Of endless life, of toil and woe
I am the burned and branded foe.
I came this torture to endure
That I might make my freedom sure.

A. No soul is free.

N. There is no soul.
See yonder gleams the starry shoal
Of orbs incalculably vast.
They are not present: they are past,
Since the long march of shuddering light
Made years the servants of its might.
There is no soul.

A. These stars thou seest
Are but the figuring of thy brain.

N. Then of all things the soul were freest

A. Move then the centre of thy pain!

N. 'Tis done.

A. A trick to cheat a child.

N. It is the truth that I am naught.
Hear what I have gathered in the wild,
Flowers of imperishable thought
With glory and with rapture clothed.
This being, thinking, loved or loathed,

Hath attributes. This sand is gold:—
Deem'st thou a gilder lurks within
The atom? What should Nature hold
Of aureate save a mind begin
Colour-conception? Then we win
To think our thought itself a chance
Grafted upon the circumstance
Of cerebrin and lethicin.

A. Ill fares the rifleman that holds
The muzzle to his eye. Yon gold's
Mental: enough! the mind is all.

N. No: this is but a slave in thrall
To matter's motion. We deny
A causeless cause, an entity
Beyond experience, that tricks
Our folly with his idle claim
To be because we feel it.

A. Sticks
The reason there?

N. We choose a name
To cover all the host of facts
Comprised in thought.

A. (*aside*) The elixir acts.

Then backward work; the name becomes
With pomp of metaphysic drums
A *causa causans*—God, soul, truth.
So raves the riot, age and youth,
The cart before the horse. Revered
And reverend master, is your beard
Darwin's survival of some tail?
Who rants of soul were best to saddle
His face, his arms the ass to straddle
Since for his voice the part thus bare
Would serve as well to scent the air.

A. Where reverence ceases, ribald jest
Breaks forth, the wise allow the rest.
The perfect master stands confessed.

N. Why! I supposed your wrath would burst;
My name and number stand accurst
In the great Order of the West!

A. Nay: Buddha smiles; 'twas Jesus wept!
Arise, O brother and adept!

N. Master!

A. The torture-hours are past.

N. The peace of pain is mine at last.

A. Ere the moon rise, the brethren meet.
Come, let us turn toward the South.
N. Lord, I embrace thy holy feet.
A. Nay, let me kiss thee on the mouth.

THE STUMBLING-BLOCK.

I ALMOST wonder if I ought
  To hymn this height of human pain:
To enter into Jones's thought
  I'd have to work with Jones's brain.

Terrestrial speech is wholly vain
  To carry meaning as it ought:—
  To enter into Jones's thought
I'd have to work with Jones's brain.

This is the High God's cruel sport:
To enter into Jones's thought
  And make its inner meaning plain,
  I'd have to work with Jones's brain.

WOODCRAFT.

THE poet slept. His fingers twine
In his wife's hair. He dreams. Divine
His dream! Nay then, I'll tell you it.

He wandered in a forest dim.
A woodcutter encountered him
Where a felled oak required his wit.
This man with a light axe did lop
The little branches at the top.
Then said the poet: "Thus why tax
Your force? This double-handed axe
Were better laid to the tree-trunk."
"Friend, are you natural, or drunk?"
Replied the woodsman; "leaf and twig
Divert the impact of the big
Axe; chop them first, the trunk is fit
For a fair aim, a certain hit.

How do you work yourself?" He spoke
To empty space—the poet woke;
And catching up a carving-knife
He slit the weasand of his wife.

AU CAVEAU DES INNOCENTS.

28th Oct., 1904.

NIGHT, like a devil, with lidless eyes,
Stands avenging over the Halls.
Sleep there is none, for day awaits
Tokens of toil; there is none that dies,
Death being rest; there is none that calls,
Voice being human; only the Fates
Rattle the dice at a sombre game,
Game without goal of peace or fame.
Sinister, sombre, horrors and hates
Lurk in the shadows, under the walls.
Light deceives, and the darkness lies.

Love there is none; he is child of peace:
Joy there is none; she is bride of force:
Thought there is none; it is birth:—there fell

Ages ago all hope of these.
Lust is awake, and its friend remorse.
Crime we snatch, between spell and spell.
Man is aglare, and is off unheard.
Woman hath speech, of a single word.
Hell may be heaven, for earth is hell!
So do I laugh, and the hideous coarse
Peals like applause re-echo and cease.

Here in the close and noisome cave,
Drunk on the breath of the thieves and whores
Close as they cram in the maw of the pit,
Sick with the stench of the kisses that rave
Round me, surfeiting sense, in scores;
Mad with their meaning, I smoke and sit
Riming at random through my teeth,
Gray with the mire of the slough beneath,
Deep in the hearts that revel in it,
Drowned in the breath of the hell that pours
In the heart of Paris its infamous wave.

Damning the soul of God, I rise,
Stumble among the dissolute bands,

A NUGGET FROM A MINE.

A MINER laboured in a mine.
(The poet dreamed) By coarse and fine
He shovelled dust into a trolley.
"But this" (the poet said) "is folly!
Take up your pick, engage in shock
At the foundation of the rock!"
The miner swore. "You —— fool!
You clever ——! go to school
And college and be ——! Strike you!
There ain't no sense in forty like you!
If I don't clear this muck, the pick
Will foul and jam, slip, swerve, or stick.
Clear off the chips, the blow goes true.
Now, mister, off, my —— to you!"
The last oath faded in the air.
The poet woke and was aware

Of property and children. Claims
His breech a vesta. Up the flames
Leap; he stalks forth, free among men,
With just a notebook and a pen.

Still red, but red with the ecstasy of blood.
Dear love, dear wife, dear mother of the child
Whose fair faint features are a match for mine,
Lurks there no secret where your body smiled,
No serpent in the generous draught of wine?
Did I guess all, who guessed your life well given
Up to my kiss? Aha! the veil is riven!
Beneath the smiling mask of a young bride
Languorous, luscious, melancholy-eyed;
Beneath the gentle raptures, hints celestial
Of holy secrets, kisses like soft dew,
Beneath the amorous mystery, I view
The surer shape, a visage grim and bestial,
A purpose sly and deadly, a black shape,
A tiger snarling, or a grinning ape
Resolved by every devilish device
Upon my murder. This I clearly see
Now you are—for an hour—away from me.
I see it once; no need to tell me twice!

II.

Some Yankee yelled—I tag it to a rime—
"You can't fool all the people all the time."

So he of politics; so I of love.
I am a-many folk (let Buddha prove!)
And many a month you fooled the lot of us—
Your spell is cracked within the ring! Behold
How Christ with clay worth more than any gold
Cleared the man's eyes! So the blind amorous
Is blinded with the horror of the truth
He sees this moment. Foolish prostitute!
You slacked your kiss upon the sodden youth
In some excess of confidence, decay
Of care to hold him—can I tell you which?
Down goes the moon—one sees the howling bitch!
The salmon you had hooked in fin and gill
You reel unskilfully—he darts away.
Alas! you devil, but you hold me still!

III.

O first and fairest of Earth's darling daughters!
How could I sing you?—you have always seemed
Unto the saucy driveller as he dreamed
Like a rich sunset seen on tropic waters—
(Your eyes effulgent from a thousand slaughters

Grope to the steep inadequate stairs
Scrawled with villainous names. My eyes
Loathe the flare of the flickering brands.
Out I climb through the greasy airs
Into the cold and desolate road.
Horror is sure of a safe abode
Here in this heart, too pale for prayers,
While over the Halls avenging stands
Night, like a devil, with lidless eyes.

ROSA INFERNI.

Ha ha! John plucketh now at his rose
  To rid himself of a sorrow at heart.
Lo,—petal on petal, fierce rays unclose;
  Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart;
And with blood for dew, the bosom boils;
  And a gust of sulphur is all its smell.
And lo, he is horribly in the toils
  Of a coal-black giant flower of hell!

BROWNING, *Heretic's Tragedy*, ix.

I.

ROSE of the world! Ay, love, in that warm hour
Wet with your kisses, the bewitching bud
Flamed in the starlight; then our bed your bower
Heaved like the breast of some alluring flood
Whereon a man might sleep for ever, until
Death should surprise him, kiss his weary will
Into the last repose, profounder power
Than life could compass. Now I tax my skill
To find another holier name, some flower

Feel your grasp tighten round my ribs until
You crush me in the ecstasies that kill.
Being away and breathing icy air
I am half lover, caring not to care;
Half-man again—a mere terrestrial ball
Thus breaking up a spiritual thrall—
Eh, my philosophers?—half-man may yet determine
To get back manhood, shake the tree from bats:
To change the trope a shade—get rid of vermin
By using William Shakespeare's "Rough on Rats."

VI.

Ah, love, dear love, sole queen of my affection,
Guess you not yet what wheel of thought is spun?
How out of dawn's tumultuous dejection
And not from noon springs up the splendid sun?
Not till the house is swept and garnished well
Rise seven other devils out of hell.

VII.

This is the circle; as the manhood rises
And laughter and rude rime engage my pen;

As I stalk forth, a Man among mere men,
The balance changes; all my wit surprises
That I who saw the goblins in your face,
That I who cursed you for the murderous whore
Licking up life as a cat laps its milk,
Now see you for a dream of youth and grace,
Relume the magic aura that begirt you,
Bless you for purity and life—a store!
An ever-running fountain-head of virtue
To heal my soul and buckler it and harden!
Your body is like ivory and silk!
Your lips are like the poppies in the garden!
Your face is like a wreath of flowers to crown me!
Your eyes are wells wherein I long to drown me!
Your hair is like a waterfall above me,
A waterfall of sunset! In your bosom
I hear the racing of a heart to love me.
Your blood is beating like a wind-blown blossom
With rapture that you mingle it in mine!
Your breath is fresh as foam and keen as wine!
Intoxicating glories are your glances!
Your bodily beauty grips my soul and dances
Its maddening measures in my heart and brain!

Looked tenderly upon me!) all the red
Raving round you like a glory shed
Upon the excellent wonder of your head;
The blue all massed within your marvellous eyes;
The gold a curtain of their harmonies
As in a master canvas of de Ryn;[1]
But ever central glowed the royal sun,
A miracle cartouche upon the edge
Of the opalescent waters slantwise seen.
This oval sealed with grave magnificence
Stamped you my queen. Thus looked your lips to
one
Who stood a casual on life's slippery ledge,
A blind bat hanging from the tree of sense
Head downward, gorged with sweet banana juice,
Indifferent to—incapable of—aught
Beyond these simple reflexes. Is thought,
Even the highest thought, of any use?

IV.

We are not discussing metaphysics now.
I see below the beautiful low brow

[1] Rembrandt.

(Low too for cunning, like enough!) your lips,
A scarlet splash of murder. From them drips
This heart's blood; you have fed your fill on me.
I am exhaust, a pale, wan phantom floating
Aimless in air, than which I am thinner. You
I see, more brilliant, of that sanguine hue
(If anything be true that I can see).
Full fed; you smile, a smile obscenely gloating
On the voluptuous wreck your lust hath wrought.
See the loose languor of precipitate thought
These versicles exhale! How rude the rime!
There is no melody; the tune and time
Are broken. Thirteen centuries ago
They would have said, "Alas! the youth! We know
This devil hath from him plucked the immortal soul."
I say: you have dulled my centres of control!

V.

If you were with me, I were blind to this:
Ready to drain my arteries for your kiss,

To drink, to acquire respect and praise:—
These visions perish as you gaze.

Eternal mockery is the real;
Eternal falsehood, the ideal.

Choose: nay, abstain from choice of these.
Go, be alone, and be at ease!

Retire: renounce: the hermit's cell
Hath all of earth, and naught of hell.

Renouncing all, keep naught enshrined
A lurking serpent in the mind.

Deem not to catch some goodlier gain
Than these; the goodliest prize were pain.

Know that the utmost heaven is void
Of aught save star or asteroid!

Or, an it please thee, idly dream
A God therein, a force supreme,

A heart of love, a crown of light,
An infinite music of delight;—

This, but no more; let fancy sway
But never fix the transient ray!

All things are lawful, so they be
At most a marshalled imagery.

Dream of Earth's glories higher and higher,
Mounting the minaret, desire;

Never attaining to the sky,
Realization—lest thou die.

So dream, possessing all; so dream,
Possessing nothing: I esteem

These twain as one, since dreams they are.
Thus mayst thou journey far and far

And far! to climes unguessed, to seas
Proud with seignorial argosies,

Is it that so the wheel may whirl again,
That some dull devil in my ear may show me:
"For John the Baptist's head—so danced Salome!"?

VIII.

Then, in God's name forbear! It does not matter.
Life, death, strength, weakness, are but idle chatter.
Nothing is lost or gained, we know too well.
For heaven they balance us an equal hell.
We discard both; an infinite Universe
Remains; we sum it up—an infinite curse.
So—am I a man? I lack my wife's embrace.
Am I outworn? I see the harlot's face.
Is the love better and the knowledge worse?
Shall I seek knowledge and count love disgrace?
Where is the profit in so idle a strife?
The love of knowledge is the hate of life.

DIOGENES.

"ALL things are good," exclaimed the boy.
Who taste the sweetmeat find it cloy.

"All things are ill," the dotard sang.
Who stir the serpent feel the fang.

"All is a dream!" the wise man spake.
Who grasp the bubble find it break.

Aye, to all three the saga saith:
There is no joy in life but death.

There is this limit set to lust:
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

O fools and blind that sickly strive
To amass, to glut yourselves, to swive,

To mountains strange with golden snows,
To gardens green with many a rose,

To secrets past the sense of sense,
Skies virgin of experience,

Untrodden avenues of mind,
Things far from hurrying humankind.

Thus spins out life its splendid charm:—
Live, love, enjoy, yet do no harm.

No rose of thought may bear or breed
The poisonous thorn of word and deed.

Call "homo sapiens" him who thinks;
Talkers and doers—missing links!

. . . .

Such songs are twilight's, when I stretch
My limbs, and wander down to fetch

My water from the cool cascade,
My wood from the enchanted glade,

My berries from the rustling bough:—
Return, and eat, and sleep. Allow

For me, the silence and the night;
Life, peace; and death, a welcome wight.

SAID.

THE spears of the night at her onset
Are lords of the day for a while,
The magical green of the sunset,
The magical blue of the Nile.
        Afloat are the gales
        In our slumberous sails
On the beautiful breast of the Nile.

We have swooned through the midday, exhausted
By the lips—they are whips—of the sun,
The horizon befogged and befrosted
By the haze and the grays and the dun
        Of the whirlings of sand
        Let loose on the land
By the wind that is born of the sun.

On the water we stand as a shadow,
A skeleton sombre and thin
Erect on the watery meadow,
As a giant, a lord of the Djinn
    Set sentinel over
    Some queen and her lover
Beloved of the Gods and the Djinn.

We saw the moon shudder and sink
In a furnace of tremulous blue;
We stood on the mystical brink
Of the day as it sprang to us through
    The veil of the night,
    And the babe of the light
Was begotten in the caves of the dew.

My lover and I were awake
When the noise of the dawn in our ears
Burst out like a storm or a snake
Or the rush of the Badawi spears.
    Dawn of desire!
    But thy kiss was as fire
To thy lovers and princes and peers.

Then the ruin of night we beheld
As the sun stormed the heights of the sky
With his myriad swords, and compelled
The pale tremblers, the planets, to fly.
      He drave from their place
      All the stars for a space,
From their bastioned towers in the sky.

Thrilled through to the marrow with heat
We abode (as we glode) on the river.
Every arrow he launched from his seat,
From the white inexhaustible quiver,
      Smote us right through,
      Smote us and slew,
As we rode on the rapturous river.

Sweet sleep is perfection of love.
To die into dreams of my lover,
To wake with his mouth like a dove
Kissing me over and over.
      Better sleep so
      Than be conscious, and know
How death hath a charm to discover.

Ah! float in the cool of the gloaming!
Float wide in the lap of the stream
With his mouth ever roving and homing
To the nest where the dove is adream.
    Better wake so
    Than be thinking, and know
That at best it is only a dream.

So turn up thy face to the stars!
In their peace be at peace for awhile!
Let us pass in their luminous cars
As a sob, as a sigh, as a smile!
    Love me and laze
    Through the languorous days
On the breast of the beautiful Nile!

May, 1905.

EPILOGUE.

PRAYER.

THE light streams stronger through the lamps of
sense.
Intelligence
Grows as we go. Alas: its icy glimmer
Shows dimmer, dimmer
The awful vaults we traverse. Were the sun
Himself the one
Glory of space, he would but illustrate
The night of Fate.
Are not the hosts of heaven in vain arrayed?
Their light dismayed
Before the vast blind spaces of the sky?
O galaxy
Of thousands upon thousands closely curled!
Your golden world

Incalculably small, its closest cluster
Mere milky lustre
Staining the infinite darkness! Base and blind
Our minion mind
Seeks a great light, a light sufficient, light
Insufferably bright,
So hidden for an hour: imagining
This vast vain thing,
We call it God, and Father. Empty hand
And prayer unplanned
Stretch fatuous to the void. Ah! men my friends,
What fury sends
This folly to intoxicate your hearts?
Dread air disparts
Your vital ways from these unsavoury follies,
Black melancholies
Sit straddled on your bended backs. The throne
Of the unknown
Is fit for children. We are too well ware
How vain is prayer,
How naught is great, since all is immanent,
The vast content

Of all the universe unalterable.
We know too well
How no one thing abides awhile at all,
How all things fall,
Fall from their seat, the lamentable place,
Before their face,
Weary and pass and are no more. So we,
Since hope must be,
Look to the future, to the chance minute
That life may shoot
Some flower at least to blossom in the night,
Since vital light
Is sure to fail us on the hideous way.
What? Must we pray?
Verily, O thou littlest babe, too weak
To stir or speak,
Capable hardly of a thought, yet seed
Of word and deed!
To thine assured fruition we may trust
This weary dust.
We who are old, and palsied, (and so wise!)
Lift up our eyes

To little children, as the storm-tossed bark
    Hails in the dark
Some hardly visible harbour light; we hold
    The hours of gold
To our own breasts, whose hours are iron and brass:—
    So swift they pass
And grind us down:—we hold the wondrous light
    Our scattering sight
Yet sees, the one star in a night of woe.
    We trust, and so
Lift up our voices in the dying day
    Indeed to pray:
O little hands that are so soft and strong,
    Lead us along!

IMAGES OF DEATH

PROLOGUE.

PATCHOULI.

LIKE memories of love they come,
  My perfumes in the silver vase:
The fragrant root, the odorous gum,
Myrrh, aloes, or olibanum:—
  Anon, like memories of love, they pass!

They pass, and all the wonder-web
  Of thought and being is unrolled
Like sombre tides there flow and ebb
  Wonderful things! not to be told:
  Beautiful things! and images of gold.

The touch of brown Habiba's breast,
  The brimming lip, the cheek of down,
The dainty dovelet in its nest:
These fade, as ever a palimpsest
  Like autumn vanishes from gold to brown.

Zuleikha, on whose marble knees
  My bearded head is lazily lain,
Shows like some stirring of the breeze
  Fluctuant in the poppied grain,
  No more at all: the vulgar sense is slain.

Of all the world alone abides
  The faint perfume of Patchouli,
That subtle death in love; it glides
Across the opening dream, derides
  The fetich folly, immortality.

Awake, O dream! Let distant bells
  And vague muezzins haunt the ear,
Gaunt camels kneel by dusky wells,
  Imagination greyly hear:
  Allahu akbar! Allahu kabir!

Over inhospitable sands
  Let the simoom its columns spin!
In snowy vales, untrodden lands,
Let there be storm, and bearded bands
  Of robbers pass around the bubbling skin!

Let there be caves of treasure rare
  Deep hidden in sepulchral seas;
And birds unheard-of darken air
  With royal wings, like argosies
  Sailing beneath magnific promontories!

Let Caliphs mete fantastic law
  And ebon eunuchs swing the sword
So swift, so curved,—let voiceless awe
Sit on the palace dome, to draw
  Some god's destruction on its smiling lord!

May many a maiden comely clad
  Revolve in convoluted curls,
Till from each pliant pose I had
  (By virtue of her wondrous whirls)
  The illusion of a thousand dancing-girls!

Let harlots robed in gold and green
  Sit slowly waving ivory plumes
And wings of palm; the while their queen
Lurks in some horror-house unseen,
  Damned to be smothered in divine perfumes!

Let there be scenes of blood and pain,
  Some Slav beneath the Cossack knout,
Some mother ripped, some baby slain,
  Let lust move silently about:—
  Soft laughter hid in all, song whispering out!

Then let these things of form decay,
  Some subtler dream dissolve their form,
As I have seen a cloudlet lay
Its forehead on the sea, and pray
  Some idle prayer to sunset, or the storm!

Yea! as a cloud in worship-trance
  Swoons in invisible delight,
Let slave and king, let death and dance
  Shake off their forms, and clothe their light
  In shrouds of sepulchre, the starless night!

Let song and cry leave tune and tone,
  Perish uncried and die unsung!
Nature, the monotonic moan
Roared by the river, thunder alone:—
  The Hoang-Ho, its note, the monstrous Kung!

Or let Kailasha's godded peak
  Summon the oread and the gnome
To leave their toils, the word to speak
  That shakes its azure-splitting dome
  With the reverberation—listen!—Aum!

Let olive fail, and mangostin!
  O'erturn the dark forbidden draught!
Give me the taste, the taste unclean
Of human flesh and blood that mean
  Some infinite horror to the light that laughed!

So let the scent of lily and rose,
  Of jasmine, taggara, pass away!
Let patchouli, patchouli, repose
  My nostrils with your odour gray,
  Dead darlings exquisite in your decay!

So, silk and velvet, fur and skin,
  Your sensuous touch shall quit me quite:
I am at swiving strain with sin—
I'll touch the stars, the blood run thin
  From the torn breast of Night, my mother Night.

Nor shall the mind revoke at ease
  These myriad cressets from the sun;
Constrained in sober destinies
  Thought's river shall its ripples run
  Into the one, the one, the one, the one.

Bursting the universe, a grip
  Girds me to God; aha! the bliss!
Begone, frail tortures wrung from whip,
Weak joys sucked hard from leman's lip,
  Ye are naught at all, are naught at all, in this!

. . . .

But brown Habiba's fawn-wide gaze
  And white Zuleikha's drowsy glance
Woo me to waking unto day's
  Delight from night's unmeasured trance:—
  To drink, to dally, to desire, to dance.

Ah! beautiful and firm your hips,
  Habib! ah! coolthsome your caress,
Zuleikha! soft your honey lips—
The tongue of pleasure subtly sips
  The wine that age distils, and calls distress.

Enough! when all is ended, when
  The poppied pleasure purples pain—
Death—shall I laugh or smile? Amen!
  I'll wake, one last fond cup to drain,
  And then—to sleep again, to sleep again!

KALI.

THERE is an idol in my house
  By whom the sandal alway steams.
Alone, I make a black carouse
  With her to dominate my dreams.
With skulls and knives she keeps control
(O Mother Kali!) of my soul.

She is crowned with emeralds like leaves,
  And rubies flame from either eye;
A rose upon her bosom heaves,
  Turquoise and lapis lazuli.
She hath a kirtle like a maid:—
Amethyst, amber, pearl, and jade!

Her face is fashioned like a moon;
  Her breasts are tongues of pointed jet;
Her belly of opal fairly hewn;
  And round about her neck is set

The holy rosary, skull by skull,
Polished and grim and beautiful!

This jewelled shape of gold and bronze
  Is seated on my bosom's throne;
She takes my muséd orisons
  To her, to her, to her alone.
O Kali, Kali, Kali, quell
This hooded hate, O Queen of Hell!

Her ruby-studded brow is calm;
  Her eyes shine like some sleepy flood;
Her breast is oliban and balm;
  Her tongue lolls out, a-dripping blood;
She swings my body to and fro;
She breaks me on the wheel of woe!

To her eternal rapture seems
  Mere nature; underneath the crown
Of dusky emeralds there streams
  A river of bliss to sluice me down
With blood and tears, to drown my thought,
To bring my being into naught.

The cruel teeth, the steady sneer,
  The marvellous lust of her, I bring
Unto my body bright and clear
  (Dropped poison in a water spring!)
To fill me with the utmost sense
Of some divine experience.

For who but she, the adulterous queen,
  Made earth and heaven with all its stars,
The storm, the hunger epicene,
  The raging at invisible bars,
The hideous cruelty of the whole?—
These are of Kali, O my soul!

The sterile force of bronze and gold
  Bends to my passion, as it grips
With feverish claws the metal cold,
  And burns upon the brazen lips
That, parted like a poppy bud,
Have gemméd curves like moons of blood.

The mazes of her many arms
  Delude the eye; they seem to shift

As if they spelled mysterious charms
  Whereby some tall gray ship should drift
Out to a windless, tideless sea
Motionless from eternity.

This then I seek, O woman-form!
  O god embowelled in curves of bronze!
The shuddering of a sudden storm
  To mix me with thy minions
The lost, who wait through endless night,
And wait in vain, to see the light.

For I am utterly consumed
  In thee, in thee am broken up.
The life upon my lips that bloomed
  Is crushed into a deadly cup,
Whose devilish spirit squats and gloats
Upon the thirst that rots our throats.

Gape wide, O hideous mouth, and suck
  This heart's blood, drain it down, expunge
This sweltering life of mire and muck!
  Squeeze out my passions as a sponge,

Till naught is left of terrene wine
But somewhat deathless and divine!

Not by a faint and fairy tale
  We shadow forth the immortal way.
No symbols exquisitely pale
  Avail to lure the secrets gray
Of his endeavour who proceeds
By doing to abolish deeds.

Not by the pipings of a bird
  In skies of blue on fields of gold,
But by a fierce and loathly word
  The abomination must be told.
The holy work must twist its spell
From hemp of madness, grown in hell.

Only by energy and strife
  May man attain the eternal rest,
Dissolve the desperate lust of life
  By infinite agony and zest.
Thus, O my Kali, I divine
The golden secret of thy shrine!

Death from the universal force
  Means to the forceless universe
Birth. I accept the furious course,
  Invoke the all-embracing curse.
Blessing and peace beyond may lie
When I annihilate the "I."

Therefore, O holy mother, gnash
  Thy teeth upon my willing flesh!
Thy chain of skulls wild music clash!
  Thy bosom bruise my own afresh!
Sri Maharani! draw my breath
Into the hollow lungs of death!

There is no light, nor any motion.
  There is no mass, nor any sound.
Still, in the lampless heart of ocean,
  Fasten me down and hold me drowned
Within thy womb, within thy thought,
Where there is naught—where there is naught!

THE JILT.

"Who is that slinkard moping down the street,
That youth—scarce thirty—bowed like sixty?"
"Oh,
A woman jilted him." "Absurd!" "Conceit!
Some youths take life—are Puritans, you know!"

I heard it, sitting in the window—glowed,
Rushed to my wife and kissed her. Lithe and
young
The rapture of some ardent madness flowed;
And—by-and-by—its miracle found tongue.

. . . .

Guess, guess the secret why I burn for you
These years so cold to woman as I was!
Guess why your laugh, your kiss, your touch run
through
My body, as it were a tunéd glass!

You cannot guess?—false devil that you are!
  To Cruelty's add calm's analysis!
You love me? Yes—then crown me a bearded Sar
  Bull-breasted by my sleek Semiramis!

Did you not hear those men below? They spoke
  Of one I think you have forgotten long;
Talked of his ruined life—half as a joke—
  But I— But I—it is my whole heart's song!

I love you when I think of his pale lips
  Twitching, and all his curls of gold awry;
Your smile of poison as he sighs and sips;
  Your half-scared laughter as his heart-beats die—

Let him creep on, a shattered, ruined thing!
  A ship dismasted on a dreadful sea!
And you—afar—some word of largesse fling
  Pitifully worded for more cruelty!

His death lends savour to our passionate life;
  His is the heart I taste upon your tongue;

His death-spasms our love-spasms, my wife;
  His death-songs are the love-songs that you
    sung!

Ah! Sweet, I love you as I see him stagger
  On with hell's worm a-nuzzling to his heart,
With your last letter, like a poisoned dagger,
  Biting his blood, burning his bones apart.

Ah! Sweet, each kiss I drink from you is warm
  With the dear life-blood of a man—a man!
The scent of murder lures me, like a charm
  Tied by some subtlety Canidian.

Ay! as you suck my life out into bliss,
  Its holier joy is in the deadlier thirst
That drank his life out into the abyss
  Of torture endless, endless and accurst.

I know him little; liking what I know.
  But you—you offer me his flesh and blood.
I taste it—never another vintage owe,
  Nor bid me sup upon another food!

This is our marriage; firmer than the root
  Of love or lust could plant our joy, my wife,
We stand in this, the purple-seeded fruit
  Of yon youth's fair and pitiable life.

. . . .

Do I not fear that you may treat me so?
  One day your passion slake itself somehow,
Seek vigour from another murder? No!
  You harlot, for I mean to kill you—now.

THE EYES OF PHARAOH.

DEAD Pharaoh's eyes from out the tomb
  Burned like twin planets ruby-red.
Enswathed, enthroned, the halls of gloom
  Echo the agony of the dead.

Silent and stark the Pharaoh sate:
  No breath went whispering, hushed or scared.
Only that red incarnate hate
  Through pylon after pylon flared.

As in the blood of murdered things
  The affrighted augur shaking skries
Earthquake and ruinous fate of kings,
  Famine and desperate destinies,

So in the eyes of Pharaoh shone
  The hate and loathing that compel

In death each damnèd minion
  Of Set, the accursed lord of Hell.

Yea! in those globes of fire there sate
  Some cruel knowledge closely curled
Like serpents in those halls of hate,
  Palaces of the Underworld.

But in the hell-glow of those eyes
  The ashen skull of Pharaoh shone
White as the moonrays that surprise
  The invoking Druse on Lebanon.

Moreover pylon shouldered round
  To pylon an unearthly tune,
Like phantom priests that strike and sound
  Sinister sistrons at the moon.

And death's insufferable perfume
  Beat the black air with golden fans
As Turkis rip a Nubian's womb
  With damascenéd yataghans.

Also the taste of dust long dead
  Of ancient queens corrupt and fair
Struck through the temple, subtly sped
  By demons dominant of the air.

Last, on the flesh there came a touch
  Like sucking mouths and stroking hands
That laid their foul alluring smutch
  Even to the blood's mad sarabands.

So did the neophyte that would gaze
  Into dead Pharaoh's awful eyes
Start from incalculable amaze
  To clutch the initiate's place and prize.

He bore the blistering thought aloft:
  It blazed in battle on his plume:
With sage and warrior enfeoffed,
  He rushed alone through tower and tomb.

The myriad men, the cohorts armed,
  Are shred like husks: the ensanguine brand

Leaps like a flame, a flame encharmed
  To fire the pyramid heaven-spanned

Wherein dead Pharaoh sits and stares
  Swathed in the wrappings of the tomb,
With eyes whose horror flits and flares
  Like corpse-lights glimmering in the gloom

Till all 's a blaze, one roar of flame,
  Death universal, locked and linked:—
Aha! one names the awful Name—
  The twin red planets are extinct.

BANZAI!

THERE leapt upon a breach and laughed
  A royally maniac man.
A bitter craft
Is mine, he saith,
  O soldiers of Japan!
I am the brothel-knave of death,
  The grimly courtesan.

Now who will up and kiss her lips,
  Or grip her breast and bone?
The subtle life she shears and snips
  Is harder gained than gone;
The lover's laughter whom she clips
  Is but a dying groan.

She lieth not on a gilded bed
  In the city without the city.

One kiss is hers full rank and red—
Do you sip at her lip? Hell hangs on her fangs!
  She loves; love laughs at pity!

Then who will up to taste her mouth?
  Who on her mount and ride?
Look to the North, the West, the South!
  There is carnage vulture-eyed.
Then who will suck the breath of death,
  The swift and glittering bride?
The bride that clings as a snare with springs
  To the warrior's stricken side?

A shudder struck the hidden men
  As the maniac's mouthings ceased.
Then, kindling, rose a roar:
  "Spread, spread the furtive feast!
The wine of agony pour!
The fruit of valour pluck!
The meat of murder suck!

"Sweet are the songs of her throat!
  Soft are the strokes of her fan!

She hath love by rime and rote,
  She is subtle and quick to man!
She danceth? Say she doth float!
  Rapture is gold in her eyes!
  She sigheth honey-sweet sighs
  Of the glory of Japan!
Red are her lips and large,
  The delicate courtesan!"

Then the officer's voice
  Caught in his throat for joy.
Like birds in spring that rejoice,
  Clearly and softly the boy
Whispered: "Now, let us charge!"
Then leaping sheer o'er trench and mound,
  They rise as a single man;
They bound like antelopes over the ground
  For the glory of Japan.

With glittering steel they wheel—they reel?
  They are steady again and straight!
The dull brute Christians red with the weal
  Of the knout—they will not wait!

The ringing cries of the victors peal
  In, in at the captured gate!

. . . .

Then o'er the field the maniac passed
  And closed the dead men's eyes.
"They are sleeping close with death at last!"
  The wanton warrior cries.
But he who saw the dead man's jaw
  Grind at the last was aware
That the harlot's kiss was Paradise
  That the soldier tasted there.
And beyond the magnificent joy of death
  Shears through the sky, as a flame
Ripping the air, the lightning breath
  Of the nation's resonant fame.
Hail! to the Hachiman deed well done!
  To the virile strength of a man!
To the stainless blaze of the Rising Sun,
  The glory of Japan!

LE JOUR DES MORTS.

At Paris upon Dead Man's Day
  I danced into the cemetery.
The air was cool; the sun was gay;
The scent of the revolving clay
  Made me most wondrous merry.

Earth, after an agonizing bout,
  Had swallowed up a widow clean.
The issue hung for long in doubt:—
—Oh! anybody can make out
  The mystery I mean.

The dead were dancing with the worms;
  The live were laughing with their lemans;
The dead-alive were making terms
With God, and notaries, and germs,
  With house-agents and demons.

All Paris keeping sacrament
  Of musing or of melancholy,
Impatient of the next event,
To spend, to barter, to be spent;—
  I chuckled at the folly.

"I would that I were dead and damned,"
  Thinks every wiser human.
"Corpses have room, and men are jammed;
Those offer food, and these are crammed:—
  And cheaper, too, is woman!"

I, being neither God nor ghost,
  A mere caprice of matter,
Hop idly in the hideous host,
Content to chaff the uttermost,
  To cackle and to chatter.

They bring their wreaths to deck the dead,
  As skipping-ropes the devils use them.
One through the immortelles perks his head.
[These sights to ghosties are as bread;
  The luckless living lose them.]

Grotesque and grim the pageant struts;
  We sit a-straddle on the crosses.
Our soulless missiles take for butts
The passers' hats, or in their guts
  Disturb their dinner's process.

Thus one man's work is one man's play;
  The melancholy help the merry.
All tread the ordered stupid way
At Paris, upon Dead Man's Day,
  In Père Lachaise his cemetery.

AVE MORS.

O VIRGIN! O my sister! Hear me, death!
The tainted kisses of the harlot life
Sicken me; hers is foul and fevered breath,
This noisome woman I have made my wife.
She lies asweat, aslime. O hear me, thou!
Wash with thy tears this desecrated brow!
With cool chaste kisses cleanse me! Lay me out,
Wrapped in a spotless winding-sheet, and soothe
These nerves ill nuzzled by the black swine's snout
With thine eternal anodyne of truth!

The foul beast grunts and snorts; but hear me, death!
Thy wings are wind-white as her hoofs are dunged.
Thy songs are faint and pale with honey breath,
Honey and poppy! as her mouth hot-tongued

Spews out its hideous lust. O loathéd life!
  Thou nameless horror of the bestial strife
Of love and hate, I straitly charge thee quit
  This bed of nastiness, this putrid sea;
For not by any amorous tricks of wit
  Shalt thou regain thine empire over me.

O virgin, O my sister! Hear me, death!
  Thou hast a sleep compelling soul and mind.
Thine is the sweet insufferable breath
  That comes like Bessarabia's twilight wind
To bring a quiet coolth from day's long heat,
  Peace to the belly gorged with blood and meat;
Stars for the sun that smote, for fire slow streams,
  For the simoom the zephyr's cooing kiss,
Deep sleep at last from all the evil dreams,
  And rest, the possibility of bliss.

THE MORIBUND.

I.

The Seven Wise Men of Martaban
Sate round the dying man.

They were so still, one would have said:
If he were dying, they were dead!

The first was agéd; in his beard
He muttered never a weird.

The next was beautiful and gay:
He had no word to say.

The third was wroth and rusty red,
Yet not a word he said.

The fourth was open and bold:
His silence girt him like fine gold.

The fifth was ruddy and fair of face;
He held his tongue a space.

The sixth was many-coloured, but
He kept his lips well shut.

The last was like a full great moon;
He knew, but uttered not, his rune.

II.

Now when the time was fully come
The dying man was dumb,

But with his failing hand did make
A sign: my heart doth ache.

At that the kingly man, the fourth,
Rose up and spat against the North.

Then made the dying man a sign:
My head is running like strong wine.

The agéd man lifted his mouth
And spat against the South.

He clutched his throat in pang of death,
As if he cried for breath.

Whereat the second beat his breast
And frowned upon the West.

Then the man sighed, as if to say:
The glow of life is gone away.

At this the rusty and wroth released
His eyes against the East.

Then the man touched his navel, as
He felt his life thence pass.

Also he smote his spine; the base
Of life burnt up apace.

Then rose the many-coloured sage;
He was right sad with age.

With him arose the ruddy and fair;
He was right debonair.

They twain to upper air and lower
Advanced the eyes of power.

Ay! but above the dead man's head
A lotus-flower was spread.

Thence dripped the Amrita, whereby
Life learneth not to die.

The seventh in silence tended it
Against the horror of the pit.

III.

Thus in a cage of wisdom lay
The dead man, live as they.

They hold him sacred from the sun,
From death and dissolution.

Within the charméd space is naught
Possible unto thought.

There in their equilibrium
They float—how still, how numb!

There must they rest, there will they stay
Innocent of the judgment day.

Remote from cause, effect retires.
Act slays its dams and sires.

There is no hill, there is no pit.
They have no mark to hit.

It is enough. Closed is the sphere.
There is no more to hear.

They perish not; they do not thrive.
They are at rest, alive,

The Seven Wise Men of Martaban;
And, moribund, the man.

THE BEAUTY AND THE BHIKKHU:

A TALE OF THE TENTH IMPURITY.

(*From the Pali.*)

I.

LISTEN! The venerable monk pursued
His path with downcast eyes; his thought revolved
Ever in closer coils serenely screwed
About the Tenth Impurity. Dissolved
All vision of his being but of one
Thing only, his sun-whitened skeleton.

II.

A dainty lady sick of simple life,
Chained to the cold couch of some vapid man,
Put on her jewels, off the word of wife,
Resolved to play the painted courtesan;

So ran along the village path. Her laughter
  Wooed all the world to follow tumbling after.

III.

Then when she met the venerable monk
  Her shamelessness desired a leprous wreath
Of poisonous flowers, seducing him. He shrunk
  Back from her smile, seeing her close white
      teeth.
Bones! he exclaimed, and meditating that,
From a mere Bhikkhu grew an Arahat.

IV.

Her husband found her gone, in fury followed
  Lashing the pale path with his purple feet,
Heedless of stones and serpents. Hail! he holloaed
  To the new Rahan whom he bowed to greet
Kissing the earth: O holy master, say
If a fair female hath passed this way!

V.

The Bhikkhu blessed the irritated man.
  Then the slow sloka serpentine began:

"Friend! neither man nor woman owns
  This being's high perception, owed
Only to Truth; nor beams nor stones
  Support the Arahat's abode.
Who grasps one truth, beholds one light,
  Becomes that truth, that light; discedes
From dark and deliquescent night,
  From futile thoughts and fatuous deeds.
Your girl, your gems, your mournful tones
  Irk not perfection with their goad.
One thing I know—a set of bones
  Is travelling on upon this road!"

IMMORTALITY

From this tale, Callicles, which I have heard and believe, I draw the following inferences:—Death, if I am right, is in the first place the separation from one another of two things, soul and body; nothing else. And after they are separated they retain their several natures, as in life; the body keeps the same habit, and the results of treatment or accident are distinctly visible in it: for example, he who by nature or training or both was a tall man while he was alive, will remain as he was, after he is dead; and the fat will remain fat; and so on; and the dead man who in life had a fancy to have flowing hair, will have flowing hair. And if he was marked with the whip and had the prints of the scourge, or of wounds in him when he was alive, you might see the same in the dead body; and if his limbs were broken or misshapen when he was alive, the same appearance would be visible in the dead. And in a word, whatever was the habit of the body during life would be distinguishable after death, either perfectly, or in a great measure and for a certain time. And I should imagine that this is equally true of the soul, Callicles; when a man is stripped of the body, all the natural or acquired affections of the soul are laid open to view.—PLATO, *Gorgias.*

IMMORTALITY.

I.

I MOVED. Remote from fear and pain
The white worms revelled in my brain.
Who travelled live may travel dead;
The soul 's no tenant of the head.
They had hanged my body by the neck;
Bang went the trap. A little speck
Shot idly upon consciousness
Unconscious of the head's distress
When with dropped jaw the body swung
So queer and limp; the purple tongue
Shooting out swollen and awry.
Men cheered to see the poisoner die.
Not he! He grinned one visible grin,
The last; then, muffled in his sin,
He lived and moved unseen of those
Nude souls that masquerade in clothes,
Confuse the form and the sensation,
And have the illusion, incarnation.

I bore myself. Death was so dull.
The dead are strangely beautiful
To the new-comer; it wears off.

II.

They told me I was damned. The Shroff[1]
Gave me ten dollars Mex. (For ease
Of English souls the dead Chinese
Are taxed) to pay my way in hell.
On one pound sterling one lives well.
For luxuries are cheaply paid
Since Satan introduced Free Trade;
And necessaries—woe is me!—
Are furnished to the damned soul free.

III.

God's hell, Earth's heaven, are not so far.
Dinner brought oysters, caviar,
Anchovies, truffles, curried rabbit
(Bad for the apoplectic habit)
While ancient brandy and champagne
Washed down the dainties. Once again

[1] Money-changer. Mexican dollars were long the sole currency on the Chinese coast.

I seemed to haunt the Continental.
A saucy little elemental
Flitted across; I heard it sneer;
"You won't get water, though, I fear."
That 's hell all over. Good-bye, greens,
Water, cold mutton, bread, and beans!
They feed us well, like gentlemen,
On chilis, seasoned with cayenne.
Worse, one must finish every course.
'S truth, I had rather eat boiled horse!

IV.

My first friend was an agéd monk.
He fed on rice and water. Sunk
His cheeks and cold his blood. You see
The fool was a damned soul like me;
He had starved himself on earth in hope
In heaven to banquet with the Pope,
With God and Christ on either hand
And all the angels' choral band
Playing sweet music. O the fool
To treat earth as a baby's school!

In hell one lives as one is wont.
Punch said to would-be bridegrooms: Don't!
Might I advise the same to those
Shapeless and senseless embryos
Who seek to live? Yes, God is wise
Enough to set a snare for lies
As well as truths. The soul content
On earth in his own element
Will be content from flesh released.
But he who strives to be a beast
Or strives to be a god; would gain
Long bliss for a few hours of pain,
Or struggles for no matter what,
Continues. I would rather not.

V.

That puzzle's grief I did not share
Because on earth I did not care.
I met a grave philosopher—
Had sought most nobly not to err
Probing God's Nature. See his lobes
Swell with hell's torment! Still he probes

The same fool's problem. I explain
The simple state of things in vain.
He chose to study God, and die in it.
He made his bed, and he must lie in it.

VI.

After my dinner I debate
(Urged to the task by habit's Fate)
The project of a poisoning.
In hell one finds that everything
Is easy. Poison to my hand;
A cunning potion cool and bland
Fit to administer the draught:—
How like old times! I nodded, laughed,
Poisoned my neighbour, a young girl
Sent here for marrying an earl.
Of course she did not die. But then
On earth I never killed my men;
They only die whom one forgets.
Remember that each action sets
Its mark still deeper in the mind!

VII.

O piteous lot of humankind
Whose history repeats itself!
Dinner is cleared by gnome and elf;
I pay the bill, take Baal's receipt,
And stroll off smoking. Soon I meet
The fairest foulest whore that burns.
High feeding pays: desire returns.
She willing (for a copper rin)[1]
For any ecstasy of sin
Gaily embraces me. A room
Starts up in the half-light, half-gloom,
Perfectly purposed for debauch.
In mirrors shines a wicked nautch,
And on the floor Hawaian belles
Rave in a hula-hula[2]—Hell's!
Fragonard, Rops, had lined the walls
With wild indecent bacchanals,
And bawdy photographs attest
The Devil's taste to be the best.

[1] Japanese coin worth a small portion of a penny.
[2] The indecent dance of the South Seas.

VIII.

I did not sleep at all: but she:—
O face of deathless agony!
O torture of hell's worm, to wrest
From peace that miserable breast!
Me, me she strikes in mid-delight
Staggered and shattered at the sight,
The moment that she slept. I laughed
Thereat: the bowl I idly quaffed
Was nectar: she amused me, so.
You see, my friend, I did not know.
I also slept at morn. Then, then,
A low voice whispered in the den:
"Lucky young fellow! Brave and clever!
This sort of thing goes on for ever."

IX.

On earth I dreaded impotence,
Age, death. You see, I had no sense.
Best be an old man ere you die;
They wish insensibility,
So are their pains the duller. Hell
Is managed infinitely well

From the peculiar standpoint of
A god who says that he is Love.

X.

That was the poet Crowley's point.
I think *his* nose is out of joint;
He bet on justice being done;
And here—it's really rather fun!—
The unlucky devil devil-spurred
Writes, climbs, does Yoga like a bird;
Just as he was before he "died,"
The ass is never satisfied.
He has only been here forty days,
And has already writ six plays,
Made eight new passes, one new peak,
Is bound to do two more this week,
And as for meditation! Hard he
Soars from Dhyana to Samadhi;
Writes wildly sloka after sloka,
Storms the Arupa-Brahma-Loka,
Disdains the mundane need of Khana,
Slogs off, like Buddha, to Nibbana:—
Poor devil!

XI.

One thing makes me weep
He was wise one way, and scorned sleep.
Wherefore he sleeps not, does not hear
That still small dreadful voice of fear.
Therefore he realizes not
That this is his eternal lot.
Therefore he suffers not at all.

XII.

Luckier is he than one, a small
Wild girl, whose one desire on earth
Was to—be blunt with it!—give birth
To children. Here she 's fairly in it!
Pumps out her fourteen babes a minute;
Her (under chloroform) the voice
Bids to be gleesome and rejoice:
" No sterile God balks *thine* endeavour.
This sort of thing goes on for ever."

XIII.

I was a humorous youth enough
On earth; I laughed when things were rough.

Therefore, I take it, now in Hades
The funny side of things—and ladies—
Engages my attention. Well!
You know enough of life in Hell.
I was an altruist, my brothers!
My life one long kind thought for others:
For me six maidens wear the willow:—
Poisoning is a peccadillo.
Hence I'm disposed to give advice,
Simple, if possibly not nice;
Shun life! an awkward task and deep.
But if you cannot, then—shun sleeep!

(Suppose I thus had prophesied,
Gone to my wife to bed, and died!)

EPILOGUE.

THE KING-GHOST.

THE King-Ghost is abroad. His spectre legions
Sweep from their icy lakes and bleak ravines
Unto these weary and untrodden regions
Where man lies penned among his Might-have-beens.
Keep us in safety, Lord,
What time the King-Ghost is abroad!

The King-Ghost from his gray malefic slumbers
Awakes the malice of his bloodless brain.
He marshals the innumerable numbers
Of shrieking shapes on the sepulchral plain.
Keep us, for Jesu's sake,
What time the King-Ghost is awake!

The King-Ghost wears a crown of hopes forgotten;
Dead loves are woven in his ghastly robe;
Bewildered wills and faiths grown old and rotten
And deeds undared his sceptre, sword, and
globe.
Keep us, O Mary maid,
What time the King-Ghost goes arrayed!

The Hell-Wind whistles through his plumeless
pinions;
Clanks all that melancholy host of bones;
Fate's principalities and Death's dominions
Echo the drear discord, the tuneless tones.
Keep us, dear God, from ill,
What time the Hell-Wind whistles shrill.

The King-Ghost hath no music but their rattling;
No scent but death's grown faint and fugitive;
No light but this their leprous pallor battling
Weakly with night. Lord, shall these dry bones
live?
O keep us in the hour
Wherein the King-Ghost hath his power!

The King-Ghost girds me with his gibbering
creatures,
My dreams of old that never saw the sun.
He shows me, in a mocking glass, their features,
The twin fiends "Might-have-been" and
"Should-have-done."
Keep us, by Jesu's ruth,
What time the King-Ghost grins the truth!

The King-Ghost boasts eternal usurpature;
For in this pool of tears his fingers fret,
I had imagined, by enduring nature,
The twin gods "Thus-will-I" and "May-be-yet."
God, keep us most from ill,
What time the King-Ghost grips the will!

Silver and rose and gold what flame resurges?
What living light pours forth in emerald waves?
What inmost Music drowns the clamorous dirges?
—Shrieking they fly, the King-Ghost and his
slaves.
Lord, let Thy Ghost indwell,
And keep us from the power of Hell!

AMEN.

Kneel down, dear maiden o' mine, and let your
eyes
Get knowledge with a soft and glad surprise!
Who would have thought you would have had it
in you?
Say nothing: on the contrary, continue!

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